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## REMARKS ON DELETION OF JAPANESE NOMINATIVE CASE-MARKER *GA*\*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In this study, I will examine the Japanese nominative case-marker *ga* in relation to its deletability. Regarding the deletion of case-markers, Kuno (1972 and 1973) observes the following sentences in (1):

(1) a. Boku- $\emptyset$  kono hon- $\emptyset$  katta.

I            this book bought

“I bought this book.”

b. Boku- $\emptyset$  gohan- $\emptyset$  tabetai.

I            meal        eat-want

“I want to eat.”

He compares the sentences in (1) with those in (2) and (3), and claims that the sentences (1a) and (1b) do not have the same meaning as (2a) and (2b), but do have the same meaning as (3a) and (3b), respectively. Let us compare:

(2) a. Boku-ga kono hon-o katta.

I-nom this book-acc bought

“I bought this book.”

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b. Boku-ga gohan-ga<sup>1</sup> tabetai.  
 I-nom meal-acc eat-want  
 “I want to eat.”

- (3) a. Boku-wa kono hon-o katta.  
 I-top this book-acc bought  
 “I bought this book.”  
 b. Boku-wa gohan-ga tabetai.  
 I-top meal-acc eat-want  
 “I want to eat.”

Sentence (2a), for example, means “It is I who bought this book,” and therefore, the nominative case-marker *ga* has an exhaustive listing interpretation.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, (1a) does not have this interpretation, but instead, it shares the same interpretation as (3a), where the topic marker *wa* indicates that “I” is the topic of the sentence without the exhaustive listing interpretation. Based on this observation, Kuno makes the following generalization:

(4) *Ga* for subject marking in the matrix sentence cannot be deleted in informal speech. All instances of subject with no overt case-markers in the matrix sentences are the result of *wa* deletion. (Kuno 1972: 282)

Masunaga (1987) challenges Kuno's generalization in (4). Examine her sentences in (5) (N.B. The following judgments are Masunaga's):

- (5) a. \*A, ame-ø hutteiru.  
 oh rain falling-is  
 “Oh, it is raining.”  
 b. \*Boku-no hoo-ø Mary-yori ookii.  
 I-'s side than big  
 “I am bigger than Mary.”

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<sup>1</sup> Kuno analyzes this *ga* as an accusative case-marker for stative verbs. I follow his analysis, and therefore, this type of *ga* is not included in my discussion. See Kuno (1973) for more details.

<sup>2</sup> See Kuno (1973:52) for more detailed discussion of the exhaustive listing interpretation of *ga*.

- c. \*A, John- $\emptyset$  kita.  
 oh,            came  
 “Oh, John has come.”

According to Masunaga, without sentence-final particles, the sentences in (5) are not very good, but if they are added, the sentences become perfect as shown in (6) (The following judgments are Masunaga's):

- (6) a. A, ame- $\emptyset$  hutteiru zo/ze/yo.  
 oh rain falling-is sentence-final-particle  
 “Oh, it is raining.”  
 b. Boku-no hoo- $\emptyset$  Mary-yori ookii zo/ze/yo.  
 I-'s side than big sentence-final-particle  
 “I am bigger than Mary.”  
 c. A, John- $\emptyset$  kita zo/ze/yo.  
 oh came sentence-final-particle  
 “Oh, John has come.”

She claims that by adding the sentence-final particles to the sentences, the verbs become focused and the NPs become defocused. That is why the sentences in (6) are perfect without nominative case-markers.<sup>3</sup> Also, she notes that the deleted case-markers in (6) are not *wa*, but *ga*. If they were *wa*, the sentences would have contrastive readings, shown in (7). Compare (6) to (7):

- (7) a. A, ame-wa hutteiru.  
 oh rain-top falling-is  
 “Oh, it is raining.”  
 b. Boku-no hoo-wa Mary-yori ookii.  
 I-'s side-top than big  
 “I am bigger than Mary.”

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<sup>3</sup> Most native speakers do not feel that the sentence (6b) is perfectly acceptable, contrary to Masunaga's judgment. I will return to this point later in this section.

- c. A, John-wa kita.  
 oh, John-top came  
 “Oh, John has come.”

With this observation, Masunaga concludes that the nominative case-marker *ga* with neutral description reading<sup>4</sup> can be deleted when the pertinent NP is defocused. She states that: “...Some elements are less prominently marked in the utterance than other elements because these elements are shared entries in the registries of the participants in the speech act and because some other element is focused....I call the elements which are shared information and which the speaker does not emphasize ‘defocused’ elements...” (1987: 39-40).

As summarized here, Kuno claims that only the topic case-marker *wa* can be omitted, while the nominative case-marker *ga* is never omitted. Masunaga challenges Kuno’s claim and concludes that case-marker deletion occurs when the pertinent NP is defocused. Therefore, the nominative case-marker *ga* can be deleted when the NP meets this condition. I agree with Masunaga’s observation that the *ga* of neutral description interpretation can be deleted. However, Masunaga heavily relies on sentence-final particles to create the environment to make the pertinent NP defocused. Therefore, her treatment of the function of sentence-final particles must be re-examined. First, I would like to point out the non-unanimous judgment on the sentence (6b), repeated here:

- (6b) Boku-no-hoo-ø Mary yori ookii-ze/zo/yo.  
 I-’s side than big-sentence-final-particle  
 “I am bigger than Mary.”

Masunaga claims that by adding the sentence-final particle *ze/zo/yo*, the verb becomes focused, and then *bokuno-hoo* becomes defocused; therefore, (6b) is acceptable without the nominative case-marker *ga*. Contrary to her judgment, however, most native speakers consider this sentence unacceptable. By using the expression “NP-*no hoo*”, the NP represents one member of a compared pair, specifically in (6b), the NP *boku* “I” is compared to Mary, and thus, the NP *boku* “I” is a focused NP in this sentence pattern. Therefore, as long as this sentence pattern is used, it is not likely that this focused NP becomes defocused simply by adding a sentence-final particle. Thus, the NP *boku-no-hoo* stays focused even with a sentence-final particle in this sentence pattern. According to Masunaga’s analysis, the nominative case-marker *ga* cannot be deleted from a focused NP, and then this would account for the unacceptable judgment for (6b). However, this also causes a problem for her analysis of the function of sentence-final particles because, if we assume that the sentence (6b) is unacceptable, it indicates that the sentence-final particle could not override the focus on the pertinent NP given by the sentence pattern “NP-*no-hoo*” and did not defocus it.

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<sup>4</sup> Kuno (1973:51) states that sentences of neutral description present an objectively observable action, existence, or temporary state as a new event.

If we interpret the base sentence of (6b), *Boku-no hoo-ga Mary-yori ookii*, as having an exhaustive listing interpretation, such as "It is I that is bigger than Mary," then, the nominative case-marker *ga* cannot be deleted even with a sentence-final particle. This is actually more favorable to Masunaga's analysis, because she claims that only the *ga* of the neutral description interpretation can be deleted. Then this *ga* is not a candidate for case deletion at all, which is consistent with the general judgment of native speakers. However, this again demonstrates that the sentence-final particle cannot override the original focus given to the pertinent NP. Judging from Masunaga's statement (1988:148) that: "One way to de-emphasize an NP is to emphasize some other element. One way of emphasizing a verb is to add a sentence final particle," she seems to assume, without further justification, that emphasizing one element automatically de-emphasizes the other element. But the unacceptable judgment for (6b) demonstrates that, at a minimum, this assumption cannot be maintained for sentence-final particles. Certainly, a sentence-final particle adds more focus or emphasis to some elements of a sentence, but it does not seem to make the other element automatically defocused. I have observed instances of case-marker deletion in which sentences are perfect without sentence-final particles, and I will exhibit such examples throughout this study.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the main objective of this study is to demonstrate that the deletion of a nominative case-marker operates under a more general discourse principle regardless of sentence-final particles in Japanese.

## 2. INFORMATION STATUS OF NP IN DISCOURSE AND DELETABILITY OF *GA*

In this section, I will first examine the nominative case-marker *ga* with the exhaustive listing interpretation. Let us observe the following example sentences:

- (8) a. Taroo-ga gakusee-da.  
           nom student-is.  
       "Taro is a student."  
       b. Hanako-ga itiban-ue-da.  
           nom oldest-is  
       "Hanako is the oldest."  
       c. Masao-ga mainiti 3 kiro aruku.  
           nom every day km walk  
       "Masao walks 3 kilometers everyday."

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<sup>5</sup> In fact, to my native informants, sentences (5a) and (5c) are acceptable.

In (8), all of the *ga* in NP-*ga* have only the exhaustive listing interpretation, i.e., they all have the interpretation that “it is the NP and only that NP that...” Often, they are answers to questions such as (9a), (9b) and (9c) respectively:

- (9) a. Kono-nakade, dare-ga gakusee (desu-ka).  
       this-within who-nom student (is-Q)  
       "Who is the student among them?"  
       b. Dare-ga itiban-ue (desu-ka).  
       who-nom oldest (is-Q)  
       "Who is the oldest?"  
       c. Dare-ga mainiti 3 kiro aruk-u (-imasu-ka).  
       who-nom everyday km walk(-Q)  
       "Who walks 3 kilometers everyday?"

Therefore, the NP-*ga* in each sentence in (8) represents the most important information in the sentence.<sup>6</sup> Notice that the *ga* in (8) cannot be deleted. Compare:

- (10) a. \*Taroo- $\emptyset$  gakusee da.  
           student is  
           "Taro is a student."  
       b. \*Hanako- $\emptyset$  itiban-ue da.  
           oldest is  
           "Hanako is the oldest."  
       c. \*Masao- $\emptyset$  mainiti 3 kiro aruku.  
           every day km walk  
           "Masao walks 3 kilometers everyday."

This shows that the nominative case-marker *ga* can never be deleted when it has the exhaustive listing interpretation, and that Kuno's claim in (4) is partially correct.

Next, I will observe the sentences with *ga* of the neutral description interpretation.

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<sup>6</sup> I am deliberately avoiding the terms such as “new” or “focus(ed)” information in my analysis. See note 7 for justification.

- (11) a. Kinoo tomodati-ga asobi-ni kita.  
 yesterday friend-nom play-to came  
 "A friend came over yesterday."  
 b. Iroirona hana-ga itinenzyuu saite iru.  
 various flower-nom all year blooming-be  
 "Various flowers are blooming throughout the year."  
 c. Kono hako-ni daizina mono-ga haitte iru.  
 this box-in important thing-nom put in-be  
 "I have something important in this box."

Although *ga* of the NP-*ga* in (11) can have the exhaustive listing interpretation, I will focus here on its neutral description interpretation. With the neutral description interpretation in (11), each sentence as a whole, not each NP-*ga*, represents important information. In other words, every element of the sentences in (11) is equally important. This interpretation is readily attained if we suppose that they are answers to questions such as the following:

- (12) a. Kinoo donna koto-ga atta-no.  
 yesterday what kind thing-nom existed-Q  
 "What was happening yesterday?"  
 b. Kono-hen no tokusyoku-wa nani.  
 here-around-of features-top what is-Q  
 "What is special about this place?"  
 c. Doosita-no, sonna mono motte.  
 what happened-Q such thing holding  
 "Why are you holding such a thing?"

For the interpretation under discussion, the nominative case-marker *ga* does not seem to be deletable as shown in (13):

- (13) a. \*Kinoo tomodati- $\emptyset$  asobi-ni kita (ze/zo/yo).  
 yesterday friend play-to came  
 "A friend came over yesterday."



- b. \*Iroirona hana- $\emptyset$  itinenzyuu saite iru (ze/zo/yo).  
 various flower all year blooming-be  
 "Various flowers are blooming throughout the year."
- c. \*Kono hako-ni daizina mono- $\emptyset$  haitte iru (ze/zo/yo).  
 this box-in important thing-nom put in-be  
 "I have something important in this box"

The sentences in (13) do not seem to improve when sentence-final particles are added, as shown in the parentheses, or if they do, the sentences no longer have the same meanings as the intended ones in (11). If the sentence-final particles alone can put more focus on the verbs, and thereby defocus the other elements of the sentence, the sentences in (13) with *ze/zo/yo* should automatically result in acceptability. However, this is not the case.

The following sentences have also an NP-*ga* of the neutral description interpretation:

- (14) a. A, ayasigena otoko-ga dete kita.  
 look suspicious man-nom came out  
 "Look, a suspicious man is coming out."
- b. A, kuzira-ga zyanpu-sita.  
 look whale-nom jumped  
 "Look, a whale jumped."

The sentences in (14) all have the neutral description interpretation for the NP-*ga* and describe what is taking place in front of the speaker's eyes. A "look" in each sentence ensures this context. Notice that, like those in (11), all the sentences in (14) present new information as a whole. Therefore, the subject NP *ayasigena otoko-ga* "a suspicious man" represents information as important as the predicate *dete kita* "came out" in (14a), and in (14b), the subject NP *kuzira-ga* "a whale" has same degree of importance as the predicate *zyanpu-sita* "jumped". It seems that the nominative case-marker *ga* is hard to delete under such an environment as shown in (11) and (14). Compare (14) to (15):

- (15) a. \*A, ayasigena otoko- $\emptyset$  dete kita.  
 look suspicious man-nom came out  
 "Look, a suspicious man is coming out."

- b. \*A, *kuzira-ø zyanpu-sita*.  
 look whale-nom jumped  
 "Look, a whale jumped."

This observation becomes more persuasive in comparison to the sentences whose elements do not carry equal importance as information within a sentence. Let us compare (14) to (16):

- (16) a. *Taroo-ga yatto detekita*.  
 nom finally came-out  
 "Taro finally came out."  
 b. *Kuzira-ga mata zyanpu-sita*.  
 whale-nom again jumped  
 "A whale jumped again."  
 c. *Basu-ga kita*.  
 bus-nom came  
 "A bus came."

In (16a), the adverb, *yatto* "finally" indicates that the speaker was waiting for Taro to come out, and therefore, the NP Taro is predictable. In (16b), *mata* "again" indicates that the speaker has already seen a whale, and therefore, the NP *kuzira* "whale" is also predictable. (16c) is uttered, for example, when the speaker sees the bus she was waiting for, and hence the NP *basu* "bus" is predictable. Therefore, the predicate in each sentence of (16) represents more important information than the subject NP. Notice that it is possible to delete *ga* in (16) without resulting in unacceptability. Examine:

- (17) a. *Taroo-ø yatto detekita*.  
 finally came-out  
 "Taro finally came out."  
 b. *Kuzira-ø mata zyanpu-sita*.  
 whale again jumped  
 "A whale jumped again."  
 c. *Basu-ø kita*.  
 bus came  
 "A bus came."

Notice that the sentences in (17) are acceptable without the sentence-final particles in the contexts specified. The NP in NP-*ga* in each sentence in (17) represents less important information compared to the rest of the sentence to begin with.<sup>7</sup> And this inequality of importance in information status seems crucial for the nominative case-marker deletion.

Let us summarize what we have discussed in this section: i) *ga* of NP-*ga* with an exhaustive listing interpretation cannot be deleted, and ii) *ga* of NP-*ga* with a neutral description interpretation has two types: one is that the pertinent NP bears the equal degree of importance to the rest of the elements of the sentence in its information status; the other is that the pertinent NP represents less important information compared to the rest of the elements of the sentence. The deletion of *ga* is not possible in the former type in (ii), while it does not result in unacceptability in the latter type. Notice that when *ga* of NP-*ga* has an exhaustive listing interpretation, the pertinent NP represents the most important information in a given sentence. This can be schematized as follows:

(18) The relative importance of information within a sentence:

- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| <i>Ga</i> of exhaustive listing interpretation:  | a) NP- <i>ga</i> > Predicate |
| <i>Ga</i> of neutral description interpretation: | b) NP- <i>ga</i> = Predicate |
|  | c) NP- <i>ga</i> < Predicate |

The deletion of *ga* cannot occur in (18a) and (18b), but it is possible in (18c). Thus, the following generalization is proposed:

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, when the pertinent NP in each sentence in (16) is completely predictable in the discourse, the whole NP can be deleted. Look at the alternatives in the following:

- (i) a. Ø yatto detekita.  
           finally came-out  
           “(Taro) finally came-out.”
- b. Ø mata zyanpu-sita.  
           again jumped  
           “(A whale) jumped again.”
- c. Ø kita.  
           came  
           “(A bus) came.”

Based on these examples, I am defending my framework in which degrees of importance are recognized as a continuum. The binary frameworks which recognize only a dichotomy between important and unimportant information such as “new/old”, “focused/unfocused” or “discourse-new/discourse-old” (see e.g. Prince 1981 & 1992), would not distinguish an NP of NP-*ga* with less value in the information structure from an NP of NP-*ga* with zero value, shown in the above examples, and would identify both types as “old”, “unfocused”, or “discourse-old”.

(19) Discourse Principles on Nominative Case-Marker Deletion:

*Ga* of NP-*ga*

- i) cannot be deleted when the relative importance of information in a given sentence is: NP-*ga*  $\geq$  Predicate
- ii) can be deleted when: NP-*ga*  $<$  Predicate

### 3. OTHER INFLUENTIAL FACTORS ON INFORMATION STATUS OF NP-*GA*

In Section 2, we observed that the predictability and recoverability of the NP in NP-*ga* influence its information status in a given sentence, thus affecting the deletability of the nominative case-marker. The following sentences do not seem to contain a predictable or recoverable NP as a subject. However, we can observe a sharp contrast in deletability of the nominative case-marker *ga*. Observe:

(20) a. Asokode, Tanaka-kun-*ga* zyogingu site-iru.

over there Tanaka-Mr.-nom jogging do-be

“Tanaka is jogging over there.”

b. Asokode, kinpatu-no otoko-*ga* zyogingu site-iru.

over there blond-of man-nom jogging do-be

“A man with blond hair is jogging over there.”

In (20), both sentences have *ga* with the neutral description interpretation. Assuming that before these utterances, the speaker did not anticipate seeing someone jogging, these sentences represent a new event as a whole, and thus, each NP of the NP-*ga* should hold the same degree of importance as the predicate at the discourse level. However, the deletability of *ga* differs. Compare:

(21) a. Asokode, Tanaka-kun- $\emptyset$  zyogingu site-iru.

over there Tanaka-Mr. jogging do-be

“Tanaka is jogging over there.”

b.\*Asokode, kinpatu-no otoko- $\emptyset$  zyogingu site-iru.

over there blond-of man jogging do-be

“A man with blond hair is jogging over there.”

Likewise, observe the following sentences.

- (22) a. Taroo-ga buranko-kara otita.  
           nom swing-from fell.  
       “Taro fell off the swing.”
- b. Kodomo-ga buranko-kara otita.  
           child-nom swing-from fell  
       “A child fell off the swing.”

The context is that the speaker took her own child Taro to the playground and was watching him swing. There were also other children playing on the swing. (22a) is uttered when the speaker witnessed her child fall, and (22b) is uttered when some other child fell. It is difficult to imagine that the speaker was anticipating someone would fall. Therefore, in these sentences, both subject NPs *Taroo* “Taro” and *kodomo* “a child” should have the same degree of importance as the predicate in their information status. However, there is a sharp contrast in acceptability when the nominative case-marker *ga* is deleted. Compare:

- (23) a. Taroo- $\emptyset$  buranko-kara otita.  
           swing-from fell.  
       “Taro fell from the swing.”
- b. \*Kodomo- $\emptyset$  buranko-kara otita.  
           child swing-from fell  
       “A child fell from the swing.”

As shown in (21) and (23), *ga* can be deleted from the sentences in (20a) and (22a), but it is difficult to do so in (20b) and (22b), although, for the sentences in (20) and (22), the context is specified so that the speaker does not anticipate to see the events done by or to the subject NPs. Each element in the sentences in (20) and (22), therefore, should be new or focused information. Then, are the sentences such as (21) and (23) counterexamples to the generalization proposed in (19)? If some differences in information status are observed between the NPs in (21a) & (23a) and (21b) & (23b), then, we can maintain the generalization (19).

Let us carefully examine those NPs again. In (21a), the NP of NP-*ga* is *Tanaka-kun* “Mr. Tanaka”, and in (23a) *Taroo* “Taro”. On the other hand, the NP of NP-*ga* is *kinpatu-no otoko* “a man with blond hair” in (21b), and *kodomo* “a child” in (23b). Obviously, the NPs in (21a) and (23a) are proper nouns, while the NPs in (21b) and (23b) are not. When we compare inherent properties of these NPs, *Tanaka-kun* “Mr. Tanaka” and *Taroo* “Taro” are referential NPs, while *kinpatu-no otoko* “a man with blond hair” and *kodomo* “a child” are not. As to the information structure, a referential NP has more inherent information than a non-referential NP. In other words, a referential

NP such as the proper nouns in (21a) and (23a) contains more information by virtue of being referential, regardless of its information status in the discourse. Therefore, we can assume that the more inherent information a pertinent NP carries at the lexical level, the less information value the NP will have at discourse level compared to the other elements of the sentence without inherent information. Therefore, although *Tanaka-kun* "Mr. Tanaka" and *Taroo* "Taro" may enter the sentence as new information in the discourse, the speaker and hearer have referential information about them, and therefore the information value in a given sentence decreases. In sentences such as (21a) and (23a), the subject NPs have less information value to begin with, compared to the predicates, by virtue of their being proper nouns. On the other hand, *Kinpatu-no otoko* "a man with blond hair" and *kodomo* "a child" do not contain much inherent information by themselves, and therefore, their information value at the discourse level is not affected by their inherent properties. I think that it is these lexical properties that make a contrast in terms of the deletion of *ga* for the sentences in (21) and (23).

This analysis is not at all implausible. In fact, Prince (1992) analyzes pronouns along the same line. She states: "Pronouns indicate that the entities they represent are salient, i.e. appropriately in the hearer's consciousness...at that point in the construction of the discourse model. Therefore they are Discourse-old..." (1992: 304).<sup>8</sup> This indicates that regardless of the fact that a certain NP is new/focused information at the discourse level, there are some assumed inherent values to each NP before it enters the discourse, and those inherent values definitely influence the information status of an element in a given sentence.

Thus, the following relationships hold for the sentences in (20) and (22) in terms of relative importance of their information status:

- (24) For (20a) and (22a): Subject NP < Predicate  
 For (20b) and (22b): Subject NP = Predicate

Hence, the nominative case-marker *ga* can be deleted from the sentences in (20a) and (22a), not in (20b) and (22b).

#### 4. CLOSING REMARKS

In this study, I described the linguistic environment in which the nominative case-marker can be deleted in Japanese, and demonstrated that the information status of each element in discourse is crucial to the deletion of *ga*. When the subject NP represents more or equally important information than or to the predicate in a given sentence (Subject NP  $\geq$  Predicate), the nominative case-marker cannot be deleted. On the other hand, when the subject NP represents less important information than the predicate

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<sup>8</sup> Prince also continue to state that : "...Thus, while the use of a pronoun probably entails that the entity it represents is Discourse-old, an entity's status as Discourse-old does not entail that it will be represented by a pronoun." (1992: 304)

(Subject NP < predicate), the nominative case-marker can be deleted. I described two factors that affect the information status of an NP: one is predictability/recoverability of an NP from the context, and the other is the inherent information an NP carries at the lexical level. In addition to the above two, I am aware that when an NP-*ga* is accompanied with audio/visual information, the nominative case-marker *ga* seems easy to delete. I am currently conducting research to describe nominative-case marker deletion in Japanese comprehensively.

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